



Programme of action for increased equality and diversity in municipal safety work.

For the period 2009 to 2014

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1. Introduction

This document seeks to describe obstacles to equality and diversity in the rescue services, and propose measures to ensure that the rescue services are open to all.

The terms ‘a different ethnic background’ and ‘a different sexual orientation’ are used frequently in this document. These terms mean an ethnic background other than Western and a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. There is no value judgement attached to these terms; they are purely descriptive.

1.1 Background

The issues of equality and diversity in the rescue services have a relatively long history. As early as 1997, the then Swedish Rescue Services Agency (SRSA), in its government approval document, was tasked with investigating measures to improve recruitment of female firefighters to the rescue services. This task was outlined in the report ‘Fireman – and woman?’ Since then, goals relating to equality and diversity have been a permanent feature of the SRSA’s government approval documents.

At the ‘Brand 2002’ conference in Uppsala, the then Minister of Defence, Björn von Sydow, made a speech in which he stated that the percentage of full-time firefighters in the Swedish rescue services who were women was 0.2%. According to the Minister of Defence, this figure was much too low and needed to change.

In March 2008, the SRSA presented a report called “Framtidens risker och säkerhetsarbete” (future risks and safety work). Twelve areas for improvement were identified, one of which was to improve equality and diversity in the rescue services.

At roughly the same time, a meeting was held in Linköping, on the initiative of the then Director General Göran Gunnarsson, bringing together a selected group of senior figures from the rescue services. The result of the meeting was a pledge from the Director General that the SRSA would develop an action plan for greater equality and diversity. The project began in August 2008 and came to an end in the summer of 2009.

1.2 Method

The work has been divided into two stages, an investigation stage and an implementation stage.

The investigation stage involved identifying problem areas that prevent greater equality and diversity within the rescue services. Mathias Ericson at the University of Borås was charged with carrying out a research review on the basis of the problem areas. The purpose of this was to confirm the problematisation and to give an overview of research specific to the context of the rescue services. The result of this was a report called “Jämställdhet och

mångfald inom kommunal räddningstjänst – en forskningsöversikt” (Equality and diversity in municipal rescue services – a research review) (MSB 0024-09).

During the second stage, the implementation stage, a meeting was held for representatives of municipal rescue services. The problem areas that had been identified were presented and the participants had an opportunity to develop and prioritise measures to increase equality and diversity in the rescue services.

Since then, on the basis of the results of this meeting, the working group has held several more meetings and in dialogue with members of the academic community drawn up the final content of the action plan.

2. Problematising

In 2007, 60 women worked as full-time firefighters and 338 women worked as part-time firefighters. As a percentage of the total number of firefighters in Sweden, that is 1.17% and 3.15% respectively. This does represent an increase since the time of Björn von Sydow's speech (when the figures were 0.27% and 1.56% respectively) but the figures are still very low. This is also the case from an international perspective, and in comparison with other traditionally male-dominated sectors.

On the basis of this information, it is hard to draw any other conclusion than that women are largely excluded from civil protection work within the rescue services.

In terms of diversity in other senses, it is more difficult to give a clear picture. Dividing firefighters into male and female is an unproblematic task and is relatively easy to measure. However, diversity in other senses is not as easy to define, and direct measurements of the current situation seem to go against the current legislation on discrimination. But it is enough to simply visit a couple of fire stations to confirm that ethnic diversity is neglected. People with a different sexual orientation are more 'invisible'. However, the number of openly homosexual people in the rescue services seems to be zero, which says something about the current situation, bearing in mind that 5-10% of the population are thought to have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

The conclusion is not as clear as on the issue of gender, but a comprehensive assessment does suggest that people with a different ethnic background or sexual orientation are likely to be excluded from working on civil protection work within the rescue services.

Although this exclusion is the fundamental problem, it has effects that have an influence on the rescue services' capacity to deliver a service characterised by equality to the citizens. One important condition for equality in our service is that society should be reflected in the rescue services, primarily from the perspective of democracy. The culture that upholds the extremely homogenous workforce of the rescue services is a problem in itself, partly when it comes to changing professional roles.

It should also be said that discrimination takes more forms than the types of discrimination mentioned above, on the basis of ethnic background and sexual orientation. These are:

- transgender identity or expression
- religion or other faith
- disability
- age

However, the focus of this work has been centred on gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The reason for this is that it has been found that it is

difficult to reconcile with the notion of who can be a firefighter with people who are 'different' in these ways. However, transgender identity or expression is in many ways similar to the issue of sexual orientation, in the same way that religion or faith is linked to the issue of ethnicity. Disability and age are not dealt with directly in this action plan.

2.1 Sub-areas

During the investigation stage, five problem areas were identified, where there are obstacles to greater equality and diversity.

Ideas on the work of the rescue services and who can become a firefighter

The work of firefighters is closely linked to qualities that are associated with manliness and being a man. This perception is widespread and may contribute to the appeal of a career as a firefighter being fairly low outside the traditional group – men. According to the statistics for admission to the SMO Civil Protection training course around 10% of applicants are women. There are no statistics on minority groups, since asking about this at the time of application would not conform to discrimination legislation.

Therefore, the problem is that too few women, and probably also too few people with different ethnic backgrounds or sexual orientations, apply to join the rescue services.

Training

There are basically two different ways of training to be a firefighter at the present time. That is to complete one of the two training courses: SMO Civil Protection or Emergency Response Operations. The SMO Civil Protection course is a two-year post-high school course, eligible for student grants and loans, while emergency operations is a nine-week course for people who are already employed by the rescue services.

One of the most serious problems is that sexual harassment and gender-based harassment occurs during the courses and work experience placements. Other problems include content, marketing and admissions, as well as the fact that the courses themselves perpetuate the current culture.

Recruitment to the rescue services

Historically, each municipality has been responsible for recruitment and for selecting staff to be sent on training courses. Traditionally, very few women or people of a different ethnic background have been accepted. For example, until 1997 there were no female full-time firefighters in the rescue services. The Swedish Equal Opportunities Ombudsman criticised recruitment to the rescue services in the report 'Kvinnlig brandman – en granskning av räddningstjänstens arbete med rekrytering' (Female firefighter - a review of SRSA recruitment), citing discrimination.

However, this problem changed (in the sense of full-time positions) with the introduction of the SMO Civil Protection training course. The rescue services had employed some women before, but the growth rate was low and the total was never more than around 20. The SRSA took over the admissions process.

However, many municipalities still use recruitment processes that place much greater demands on applicants than what is necessary for admission to the SMO Civil Protection training course. It has also been shown that female students are less likely than their male counterparts to apply for work with the rescue services, usually turning to other employers. One reason for this may be the SRSA's recruitment process.

In this context, it should be noted that this process is not just about physical tests, but about aptitude on the whole, from work-related information to informal conversations and CV evaluation.

Psychosocial working environment

The rescue services as a workplace is characterised by a strong unity and sense of camaraderie, but those who do not 'fit in' from the start are at risk of being excluded. When a woman or someone with an ethnic minority background starts work in the rescue services, it is primarily the psychosocial working environment that can create a feeling of exclusion. Ignoring, freezing out and harassing colleagues are some examples of subliminal exclusion methods that exist.

Physical working environment

The equipment and premises of the rescue services are largely suited to a one-gender workforce. The physical environment is a clear indication of who is expected to feel at home in this profession. Examples of obstacles include poorly fitting personal safety equipment and the lack of separate showers.

3. Measures

The measures presented here are a result of the working group meeting in Stockholm and the work of the project group. In the long term, the purpose of these measures is to achieve a more even gender balance in the rescue services, along with greater, more visible diversity. In the shorter term, the goal is that by 2014, 40% of those employed to work as firefighters in the rescue services will be women.

Implementation of the measures is planned for the period between 2009 and 2014. The details of implementation of the action programme are as yet undecided, but the working hypothesis is that an umbrella project will be created for the proposed measures. The Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section and the Training, Exercises and Emergency Preparedness Department will take responsibility for implementation of the action programme.

Below is a chart showing roughly when the various measures are to be implemented.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kommunikationsprojekt	[Red bar covering 2009-2014]					
En brandstation för alla	[Red bar covering 2010-2014]					
Bidrag till lokala aktiviteter	[Red bar covering 2009-2014]					
Regionala mångfalds- och jämställdhetsutvecklare	[Red bar covering 2010-2014]					
Mångfaldsperspektiv i översynen av utbildningen	[Red bar covering 2009-2010]					
Brändmannens fysiska förmåga	[Red bar covering 2009-2011]					
Anpassning av verksamhetsställena	[Red bar covering 2009-2013]					
Medvetandegöra politiker	[Red bar covering 2009-2014]					
Granskningsrutin inom MSB	[Red bar covering 2009-2014]					

3.1 Communication project on gender equality and diversity

A communications officer/project manager will be recruited to work with the sector to change the image of the job of firefighter, and people's perceptions of who can become a firefighter.

Expected effect

More women and people with a different ethnic background or sexual orientation will become interested in working as firefighters and will apply either to be rescue service personnel or to do the SMO Civil Protection training course.

Description

A communications officer/project manager will be recruited, primarily to change the image of the job of firefighter, and people's perceptions of who can become a firefighter. One of this person's objectives will be to create a specific website as a portal for gender equality and diversity in the rescue services. Examples of other activities that could be included in the project are:

- Drawing up arguments for greater gender equality and diversity in the rescue services.
- Developing a new name for the job of 'fireman' (brandman in Swedish)
- Producing a film on the work of firefighters
- Ensuring the MSB's involvement in the Pride festival

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section

The municipal rescue services, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and trade union and third sector organisations will be very important partners, and will be expected to work with the MSB towards these goals.

3.2 A fire station for everyone

In a selected municipality, the MSB will create one or several 'model stations', with a good gender balance and visible diversity.

Expected effect

This station will have a good gender balance, visible diversity and a working environment free from harassment and discrimination. This example will inspire other municipalities to take measures to achieve the same thing.

Description

This example is taken from Dr David Baigent, who participated in the working group meeting in Stockholm, and it is based on experience from equality and diversity work in the rescue services in the United Kingdom. The basic premise is that it is more or less impossible to change all municipal rescue services at once. Initiatives that are too sparse and too widely spread can actually make this work more difficult. Instead, it's better to invest in selected locations, in order to achieve good representation of women and minority groups there. All the energy of equality and diversity work is invested in this or these stations. This or these stations are also closely monitored in order to assess the results of this investment. In this way, the project can 'test the water', and measures to increase equality and diversity can be evaluated, while also creating a good example that can be used in changing people's perceptions of who can be firefighters.

Possible activities include extensive staff training, support for renovation of premises, contributions to equipment purchasing, and coaching of managers.

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section

3.3 Contribution to local activities

Every year, the MSB will set aside funds that the municipalities can apply for in order to implement activities to increase equality and diversity.

Expected effect

The municipalities will be stimulated to take measures towards greater equality and diversity.

Description

Every year, the MSB will set aside funding that municipalities can apply for. The conditions for receiving support will be clearly defined and focused on achieving greater equality and diversity. External and internal activities will be eligible for funding. Examples include 'try it out days', information meetings, work with school classes, etc.

The over 60 municipal rescue services that have received funding so far have all reported good experiences from activities they have carried out. It has transpired that these activities have often resulted in a greater number of applicants for advertised positions, and an extra opportunity for the rescue services to showcase their work.

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section

3.4 Regional diversity and equality developers

A network of 8 regional equality and diversity developers will be created to work on issues of equality and diversity at regional level. They will be seconded from the rescue services to work on these issues for 25% of a full-time position.

Expected effect

Issues of equality and diversity will be given a local touch, and will gain more support in the sector, which will facilitate awareness-raising activities like municipal information gathering.

Description

The basic premise of this measure is to construct a network for equality and diversity work. 8 regional equality and diversity developers will be employed in part time (25%) positions by the MSB. They should be seconded from the rescue services and should be selected via an application process.

Their role will be to represent the MSB all over the country in issues of equality and diversity. For example, within their geographical areas of responsibility, they should train personnel and support work to change the rescue services. They should create networks and organise regional meetings. They should also participate in the work to change the image of the job of firefighter, and people's perceptions of who can become a firefighter. They will also be an important resource for the MSB's information gathering work in this area.

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section

3.5 The equality and diversity perspective applied to a review of the education system

A review of the education system will be carried out to ensure that particular attention is paid to equality and diversity, beginning in autumn 2009.

Expected effect

A chapter in the final report about the review, specifically detailing issues of equality and diversity and offering recommendations for change. In the longer term, these changes will lead to more women and people with different ethnic backgrounds graduating from the SMO Civil Protection training course.

Description

There is dissatisfaction among the municipalities because too few women and people with different ethnic backgrounds graduate from the SMO Civil Protection training course. Furthermore, the MSB has been criticised because not enough of the women who do graduate from the SMO Civil Protection training course are employable. The reasons for this should be investigated, and measures to deal with this criticism and dissatisfaction should be suggested.

The content of the course should also be reviewed. This is a question of equality integration, for example, how equality and diversity training can be included in the course plans for the basic and advanced courses that the MSB runs.

Responsible

Training, Exercises and Emergency Preparedness Department

3.6 Continuation of 'The firefighter's physical capacity'

The MSB will initiate a development project seeking to draw up proposed threshold values to define the physical capacity needed in order to be able to do the job of a firefighter.

Expected effect

More standardised and relevant levels for the physical requirements for new recruits to the rescue services.

Description

In the early 2000s, the then SRSA carried out a development project seeking to draw up relevant and standardised methods for testing physical capacity in recruitment of firefighters. However, the project did not decide on a specific level of physical capacity across the board, but left it to the municipal rescue services to set limits. This has resulted in what has been called the 'big city model'. In other words, the method is scientifically developed, while the levels are set arbitrarily.

The problem is that few women can manage the tests set in Sweden's big cities. What's more, the wide variation in physical requirements for firefighter recruitment causes problems, as it is then difficult for applicants to the SMO Civil Protection training course to know what might be required of them in terms of physical capacity in order to work for the rescue services. What is needed is a scientific basis for to define relevant levels of physical capacity and achieve a more uniform approach.

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section

3.7 Focus on the physical and psychosocial working environment at MSB workplaces

The MSB will review the physical and social working environment at its workplaces in Revinge and Sandö from an equality and diversity perspective. The MSB should lead the field and should be a role model.

Expected effect

More women and people with a different ethnic background or sexual orientation will complete the training courses and not drop out. Equality and diversity requirements in procurement will create a market for this kind of product. The students should inspire the municipalities to take measures at a local level.

Description

This measure can be divided into two parts. One part is about the physical working environment at the workplaces, and one is about the psychosocial working environment.

To a certain extent, women have different physical attributes to men. In general terms, women are shorter, have smaller hands and do not usually have the same strength in their fingers, arms and upper body. That is why it is extremely important for the credibility of the MSB that it acts as a role model in terms of adapting the physical training environment and the courses at these workplaces on the basis of this.

Furthermore, we know from investigations carried out that sexual harassment and gender-based harassment take place at MSB workplaces. So it is not unreasonable to assume that this also applies to minority groups, although there is no specific investigation on discrimination against these groups. That's why it is important that the MSB implements measures to improve the psychosocial working environment for students and teachers alike. In this area too, the MSB must be a role model.

Examples of activities in this area might be acquiring equipment that is suited to use by women, studying best practice, changing procurement procedures to put pressure on manufacturers, and training teachers and workplace-based tutors in gender-aware pedagogy.

Responsible

Training, Exercises and Emergency Preparedness Department

3.8 Making politicians aware

The MSB will work with SALAR to raise issues of equality and diversity in the rescue services at a political level.

Expected effect

Pressure for change, in terms of greater equality and diversity in the rescue services, will grow at a local level.

Description

Municipal rescue services are governed by elected politicians. Together with the management, they have a responsibility to create rescue services characterised by equality and diversity. Usually, the majority of members of rescue services committees, or equivalent bodies, are local politicians. In order to be able to raise the issue of equality, they need to be made aware through education and information.

SALAR has access to this arena and interfaces with this group, and has shown an interest in supporting the MSB in this area. The MSB should therefore work with SALAR to draw up specific measures and then put them into practice. An example of a specific measure might be meetings with politicians on equality and diversity in the rescue services.

Responsible

Development of Rescue Services and Emergency Management Section jointly with SALAR

3.9 Inspection procedure within the MSB

The MSB will create an inspection procedure for all external communication, in order to ensure no messages are disseminated that are not in line with the MSB's work to bring greater equality and diversity to the rescue services.

Expected effect

The MSB will have a clear voice on issues of equality and diversity.

Description

Sometimes the MSB does disseminate messages in its external communications that, although not consciously, in some way counteract the MSB's own work to increase equality and diversity in the rescue services. That's why there is a need for a procedure or function that ensures that no such mistakes are permitted.

This could be done, for example, by setting up a procedure for preparing external information, where equality and diversity are included as natural parameters to keep in consideration. In order for this to be possible, communication personnel must be trained in equality and diversity. In addition, procurement procedures for marketing services need to be reviewed. Existing information material such as brochures, conference materials and the MSB's website should be reviewed and inspected.

Responsible

MSB strategic management

4. Feedback

It is extremely important that the initiatives outlined in this action programme are monitored and evaluated thoroughly. This will be done quantitatively and qualitatively, and will be reported on an annual basis.

Quantitative monitoring will be based on gathering data and monitoring changes over time. For example, data used will include the number of women in the rescue services, the number of reported incidents of discrimination, and information on applicants to the courses.

Qualitative monitoring will be more about investigating things that cannot be captured in the form of statistics. In order for this to be possible, there must be a close, ongoing dialogue with the municipal rescue services. This dialogue will take place through annual equality and diversity seminars, as well as visits to the municipalities.